

Bacteria Keep Landing Road Beach Closed

By KEITH L. MARTIN

High bacteria counts are keeping beachgoers out of the waters on Landing Road Beach for the third straight week. As of press time Tuesday, the beach remained closed.

The Board of Health closed the beach on Thursday after receiving word from the state's Department of Health that a recent series of tests on the water showed questionable levels of the bacteria *Enterococci*, a proven indicator of fecal contamination in marine recreational waters.

Under the Massachusetts Beach Act, if the waters in a single test indicate a level of *Enterococci* over 104 colony forming units, the beach is closed. This was the case in the last two closures at Landing Road on July 1 and July 9, according to Health Agent Jennifer Dalrymple.

In addition to closing beaches on a single test, said Dalrymple, the state also orders a beach shut down if the geometric mean of the last five tests over a period of 30 days is higher than 35 colony forming units, which is the case for the current closure at Landing Road.

"This is a better indicator of long-term bacteria content in the water," said Dalrymple. "People may think that the current bacteria levels are over 104, but that's not the case right now. I don't think many know about closing when the mean is over 35."

She added that at least two more tests would be needed before her department considers opening the beach again to swimmers and that they will track the numbers to recalculate the mean using that new test information.

The new tests will also be done with a new apparatus, thanks to the Harbormaster's Office, said Dalrymple. As opposed to waiting until low tide to take samples and possibly getting silt from the bottom of the bay, the harbor-master's office has created a longer stick to get a sample of water to avoid that happening and hopefully provide a cleaner supply for testing.

Dalrymple said that while the continued bacteria counts at the beach are a concern for her department, they will not be solved overnight. In addition to conducting two more tests, the testing requires a 24-hour-incubation period so there is no set date for the beach to reopen.

Last week, Dalrymple said that if the bacteria problem persisted at Landing Road, her department might investigate the possibility of a leak in underground stormwater pipes that might be sending bacteria into the waterway, but that will determine on the new tests being conducted on the water.

To do this, Dalrymple said that she would work with the Department of Public Works and Conservation Administrator Joe Grady on looking at the drainage, but that staffing is low in both conservation and the health department due to budget cuts.

"It will be tough because both our departments are spread thin...to try and figure out where we are coming from," she said. "We'll have to trace the storm drains and other things and that takes a lot of manpower."

Ingesting a large amount of the water with the bacteria could cause a variety of diseases, with the most common a mild gastroenteritis with flu-like symptoms. Dalrymple said rather than chance any illness, the state and the town order the beach closed for safety.

Dalrymple added that she does feel for Landing Road beachgoers and that she hopes the Board of Health can reopen the beach once they have a handle on the bacteria levels there.

"If we can test twice this week, I'll be happy, but it will depend on rain events," she said.

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For the last three weeks, Landing Road Beach has had fluctuating levels of bacteria leading to its closure three times this month. The following are the last six tests for Enterococci conducted on the waters; because the geometric mean of the tests over the last month is over 35 CFU, the state has ordered the beach to be closed. When the levels are over 104 CFU per 100 ml, the beach is also ordered to be closed.

<u>Test Day</u>	<u>Bacteria Level</u>
07/13/2004	15 CFU/100 ml
07/09/2004	14 CFU/100 ml
07/07/2004	120 CFU/100 ml
07/01/2004	84 CFU/100 ml
06/29/2004	120 CFU/100 ml
06/22/2004	82 CFU/100 ml
06/15/2004	64 CFU/100 ml